

Washington, D.C. – The American Counseling Association presented U.S. Rep. Tom Rooney (FL-16) with a Legislative Service Award on Friday in recognition of his legislative efforts to address the mental health needs of America's troops and veterans.

"After years of sweeping mental health problems among our military and veteran communities under the rug, I'm pleased that we're finally starting to address these issues head on and give our troops and veterans the support they deserve," Rooney said.

"Although we have taken good steps toward addressing the mental health needs of our troops and veterans, the high rates of suicide, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury show that we still have a long way to go."

In addition to their legislation requiring confidential mental health screenings for returning war-fighters, Rooney introduced the "Counselor Accessibility Reform and Expansion for Soldiers (CARES) Act" with Congressman Mike McMahon (D-NY). The CARES Act would give TRICARE beneficiaries direct access to professional mental health counselors without needing a referral.

"Eliminating the outdated and cumbersome referral requirements will increase accessibility to mental health professionals for all TRICARE beneficiaries," Rooney said. "Streamlining this process will make it easier for our troops and returning veterans to get the care they need, when they need it."

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